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## Introduction: Extended Student-Faculty Partnerships: Deepening Insights, Transforming Relationships

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## **INTRODUCTION: EXTENDED STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS: DEEPENING INSIGHTS, TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS**

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Recognition of the power of student-faculty partnerships is growing. In a recent publication of the United Kingdom's Higher Education Academy, Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) claim that "engaging students and [faculty] effectively as partners in learning and teaching is arguably one of the most important issues facing higher education in the 21st century" (p. 7). This claim builds on similar arguments, such as Gärdebo and Wiggberg's (2012) contention that, "If there is to be a single important structural change during the coming decades, it is the changing role of students who are given more room in defining and contributing to higher education" (p. 9). These calls for redefining the role of students in higher education affirm the pioneering efforts of individual institutions that have embraced principles of student-faculty pedagogical partnership for decades (e.g., Sorenson, 2001; Hagstrom et al., 2014).

Created to showcase the efforts of those who embrace student-faculty partnership, this journal has featured the work of undergraduate students and faculty members who collaborate to analyze, affirm, and, where appropriate, revise classroom practice and, through their collaboration, redefine the student-faculty relationship more broadly. Previous issues have focused on partnerships in teacher education (Winter 2015) and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (Winter 2012), among others, but the majority of the essays have focused on partnerships through the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) Program. SaLT is the signature program of the Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges and one of the longest standing programs to support extended student-faculty partnership. Through SaLT, faculty members work with undergraduate students positioned as pedagogical consultants in semester-long partnerships. The student consultant observes one session of his or her faculty partner's class each week, meets weekly with his or her faculty partner, and participates in weekly meetings with other student consultants and me in my role as the director of the program.

Faculty members who have experienced these pedagogical partnerships affirm their potential to deepen insights and transform relationships. Working in partnership with student consultants gives faculty members rare opportunities to engage in reflective dialogue about their pedagogical commitments and classroom practices. This opportunity provides immediate practical benefits and supports longer-term "self-authoring." The process of self-authoring, defined by Baxter Magolda (2007) as "the internal capacity to define one's own belief system, identity, and relationships" (p. 69; see also Gunersel, Barnett, & Etienne, 2013), is enacted through engagement with others—in this case, with student collaborators focused on explorations and enactment of pedagogy. As Oh (2014) put it: "The presence of my student consultant has turned out to be one of the most constructive factors in navigating my first semester at Bryn Mawr, one that will have lasting impact on my pedagogical commitments and academic identity as a teacher."

Building positive and productive relationships with students is a critical aspect of both clarifying pedagogical commitments and developing a strong academic identity as a teacher. About working with her student consultant through the SaLT program, a new faculty member at Haverford College wrote: “Emma offered observation without judgment — a rare gift — and along with it, a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose” (Reckson, 2014). Faculty like Reckson quickly come to see their partnerships with student consultants, in her words, “as a model for professor-student partnerships more broadly.” Such a revision highlights how this collaborative work leads to a radical shift both in approaches to teaching and learning and in the teacher-student relationship; “rather than faculty and students facing each other across a room in a combative manner, we are sitting on the same side of the desk, working together to pursue the common goal of learning and development” (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, p. 13).

SaLT partnerships are designed to last only a single semester, typically the first semester that faculty members join the Bryn Mawr and Haverford communities, as part of the orientation and development of incoming faculty (Cook-Sather, in press). However, each year between one quarter and one half of the faculty participants who work in partnerships with student consultants during their first semester request support to continue in such partnership during a second semester. Recognizing the power of continued reflection and dialogue with a student who is not enrolled in their courses and who has developed extensive knowledge of their pedagogical values and approaches, faculty members want to hold open the space within which they can collaborate with students in these ways. The deepening of insights and the transformation of relationships fostered by these extended partnerships is the focus of this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*.

In extending their partnerships to yearlong collaborations, most faculty members choose to work with the same student consultant—a partner with whom they have, as one faculty member put it, “built a rapport.” Such rapport allows faculty members to be at once confident and vulnerable when they want “to try new things.” As this faculty member continued: “[My consultant has] seen me teach last semester, and knows I listen to her and she knows my tendencies.” These qualities also make the faculty member receptive to the consultant’s suggestions because of “the comfort level” they have developed (Cook-Sather, in press). Three of the essays in this issue focus on partnerships that take this form.

In “One Year of Collaboration: Reflections on Student-Faculty Partnership,” Joel Alden Schlosser, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Bryn Mawr College, and Abigail Sweeney, Haverford College Class of 2015, describe their yearlong collaboration through the SaLT program. Their partnership began in the context of the semester-long pedagogy seminar offered to Joel as a new full-time faculty member, and it continued during a second semester as an independent study through which Abby earned course credit. In the space Joel and Abby created between the structure and the freedom provided by the SaLT program, they focused on “three areas of experimentation and learning”: transparency, “planned not planning,” and aligning pedagogy and evaluation. As they explain: “Because of the respect and trust generated from the success of the first semester, the second semester could proceed in a different register: we knew one another well enough to share our passions; finding enthusiasm in common expanded what we could imagine together.”

The second essay that documents a yearlong collaboration, “Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn: Insights from a Year-long Partnership into Teachers’ and Students’ Perspectives and Practices,” is co-authored by Erin Schoneveld, Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges, and Juliana Montinola, Bryn Mawr College Class of 2016. Schoneveld and Montinola alternate perspectives in their essay to offer a series of insights about student perspectives, teaching, and learning that they gained through their partnership. While offered from their different positions and perspectives, their insights have a number of aspects in common. Both gained what Schoneveld calls “critical distance,” discerned patterns of engagement and qualities of experience that they would not likely have discerned had they not been in dialogue, deepened their appreciation for the work in which both faculty and students engage, and came to see, in Montinola’s words, that “successful learning is ultimately a collaborative effort between professors and students.” The duration of the partnership was key to the depth of insight both partners gained and to the transformation of the teacher-student relationship. As Schoneveld explains, “Because we had developed such a strong working relationship during the Fall 2014 semester, we continued to work together in a different capacity [in the Spring semester]. Rather than consult through direct observation of the class, Juliana took on the role of a dialogue partner—a person with whom the professor can share ideas and plans regarding the course and its development throughout the semester.”

In a third essay that documents a yearlong partnership between a faculty member and student consultant, “Collaborating in the Russian-language Classroom,” Mariana Irby, Bryn Mawr College Class of 2015, and Irina Walsh, Lecturer in the Russian Department at Bryn Mawr College, describe the two different phases of their collaboration. During the first semester, they focused on Irby’s observations of Walsh’s classroom and on revising the syllabus for the course to reflect their discussions. In their second semester, they switched their focus to the development and refinement of a syllabus for a Russia-centered humanities course that Walsh would be teaching in English in the fall of 2015. In the conclusion of their essay, Walsh clearly articulates the ways in which her partnership with Irby changed her approach to teaching and her relationship with students: “Through my conversations with Mariana, I came to understand better how one creates a space in the classroom where everyone is comfortable and professional at the same time, and thereby highly productive; a community in which everyone is an active contributor and everyone is responsible for the success of the course and of their own learning.”

The fourth essay in this issue was co-authored by a faculty member who chose not to continue with the same student consultant but rather to work with a group of students who have particular experiences and knowledge bases on which she wished to draw. Louise K. Charkoudian, Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Haverford College, assembled a team of students who had taken her first-semester organic chemistry course during her first semester at the College to help her revise course content, assignments, and methods of assessment. The essay she and her student co-authors, Anna C. Bitners, Noah B. Bloch, and Saadia Nawal, wrote about this experience is called “Dynamic Discussion and Informed Improvements: Student-led Revision of First-Semester Organic Chemistry.” Charkoudian describes their approach this way: “We started off with ‘big picture’ items such as the order of when I introduced various concepts/techniques and eventually dug into the details of the course such as evaluating the effectiveness of individual problems from exams and problem sets.” Throughout the semester, they worked together on various aspects of the course: “Each week I would give the students a specific item

to focus on (for example, one week was to focus on exam questions) and students would work on their own to come up with ideas for improvement. We would meet the following week to discuss our thoughts and then I would give them their next item to focus on” (Cook-Sather, in press).

Whether focused on pedagogical transparency, “planned not planning,” and aligning pedagogy and evaluation; insights about student perspectives, teaching, and learning; classroom practice and syllabus design; or a thorough review of a course’s content, assignments, and methods of assessment, all these partnerships shared—and achieved—the goal of deepening the trust, analysis, and insights developed during the first semester in partnership. Spending such focused time in partnership not only deepens the relationship between faculty member and student(s) that was developed through their initial experiences of partnership; it helps solidify the mindset and cultivate the habit of partnership.

With this new mindset, faculty can, in Reckson’s (2014) words again, see the classroom “as a space of encounter that students and teachers negotiate both individually and collectively, all while learning — always learning — to be generous interlocutors of our critical objects, and of each other.” Such an embrace of a partnership mindset is reinforced through yearlong collaborations. As Schoneveld writes in “Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn: Insights from a Year-long Partnership into Teachers’ and Students’ Perspectives and Practices,” she “learned through working with Juliana,” her student consultant, that “establish[ing] common ground through which to connect with all of my students as well as provide them with the tools to make their own intellectual discoveries” requires “a willingness to collaborate with my students in a variety of different ways.” Similarly, Schlosser and Sweeney write in “One Year of Collaboration: Reflections on Student-Faculty Partnership,” “Had our collaboration ended with the single semester, we certainly would have learned from the sheer variety of approaches that we generated; however, having a second semester as well as a strong basis of trust and respect allowed us to build on this foundation by creating a structure of student collaboration that incorporated the best parts of our own work together while also leaving plenty of autonomy for them to use these structures as best fit their learning needs.”

Such revisions of their relationships with students is a theme for faculty who participate in yearlong partnerships with student consultants. In the conclusion to “Collaborating in the Russian-language Classroom,” Walsh reflects: “From the outset, my partnership with Mariana...made me contemplate and see the advantages of building a partnership relationship with my students, in which students have a say in the dynamic of a course.” Likewise, Charkoudian captures in “Dynamic Discussion and Informed Improvements: Student-led Revision of First-Semester Organic Chemistry” the shift toward collaboration she experienced with the students enrolled in her revised course when she taught it again: “I felt like I was a part of a team, and that I was working along-side my students to achieve the course objectives. This experience taught me that the nexus between ‘teacher’s perspective’ and ‘students’ perspective’ creates fertile ground for learning.”

While this embrace of a partnership approach has clear immediate and longer-term benefits to faculty, equally powerful are the outcomes for student consultants. As Anna Bitners, Noah Bloch, and Saadia Nawal, student co-authors of “Dynamic Discussion and Informed

Improvements: Student-led Revision of First-Semester Organic Chemistry,” put it, “As students going into this experience, we were fairly confident that a major outcome would be an improved course. What we didn’t expect was that the experience would have such a profound impact on us.” The impacts they discuss include: a deepened understanding of what it takes for faculty to prepare to teach a course and how students can make the most out of courses in which they enroll; reinforcement of fundamental concepts in organic chemistry; and an opportunity to meld interests in chemistry and education. They also include a deepening of insight overall. As Nawal put it: “This experience allowed me to not only share my input and perspective, but also deepened my understanding on the act of teaching.”

Growth in student confidence is another profound impact of partnership work. In “One Year of Collaboration: Reflections on Student-Faculty Partnership,” Schlosser and Sweeney explain: “Abby found that collaborating with Joel strengthened her confidence in her own voice and ideas.” In addition, during their second semester, Abby “became more comfortable advocating for learning that she imagined students would find fun, challenging, engaging and memorable.” Likewise, Montinola wrote in “Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn: Insights from a Year-long Partnership into Teachers’ and Students’ Perspectives and Practices” that working as a student consultant “has helped me shift my perspective on the professor-student relationship. I’ve learned to think of professors as approachable guides as opposed to intimidating and rigid authority figures, and this small change reminds me that I have a voice in my own classroom experience.”

This recognition that professors can be approachable connects to another profound impact partnership work has on students’ sense of agency as learners and leaders. As Irby writes in “Collaborating in the Russian-language Classroom,” “Looking towards the future, I hope that my experiences participating in [this partnership] with Irina will contribute to a small cohort in graduate school. Through my partnership, I not only reflected on pedagogical methods, but on classroom dynamics, linguistic and cultural immersion, and strengthened my skills working in a cross-cultural and multilingual environment.”

The deepened commitment to partnership can happen at three levels: between faculty members and student consultants, between faculty members and their own students, and between student consultants and others with whom they work. All three of these forms of partnership affirm the power of mutual respect, shared responsibility, and a commitment to reciprocity among all of those who learn and teach in higher education. As Schlosser reflected in “One Year of Collaboration: Reflections on Student-Faculty Partnership,” the collaborative relationship he had with Sweeney “provided a safe space in which to take risks and thus push his self-authorship beyond the predictable conventions of college teaching.” The conventions of college teaching can not only limit faculty members’ efforts at self-authorship but also keep faculty and students squarely in their traditional roles. But according to calls such as Healey’s et al.’s (2014) and Gärdebo & Wiggberg’s (2012), those conventions need to change. The practice of partnership, in which each participant both gives and gets not with the goal of exchanging a commodity but rather with the goal of enriching one another as human beings (Cook-Sather & Felten, forthcoming), offers and enacts a different ethic and approach to teaching and learning in higher education.

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